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Defection May Have Been Expedient

Did British Prod Philby to Flee?

Special to The Washington Post

LONDON, Oct. 21 — British double agent Harold (Kim) Philby may have been prodded into defecting to the Soviet Union by his own superiors in the British intelligence service, the London Sunday Times reported today.

Philby, who was kept on the intelligence payroll in the Middle East even after the 1951 defection of Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean, finally fled to Moscow from Beirut, Lebanon, in 1963 after being confronted with the evidence against him by MI-6, Britain's CIA.

In the third in a series of articles detailing Philby's spy career, the Sunday Times said the mounting evidence against Philby during the late 1950s left the British government

four possible actions: eliminate Philby, abduct him and return him to London to face trial, try to persuade him to return voluntarily, or try to "frighten him into defecting."

Newspaper's Report

Of this, the Sunday Times reported:

"To Harold Macmillan, then Prime Minister, it was a matter of small importance—it was not then thought Philby was doing damage as he was under such suspicion by 'C' (the head of MI-6).

"But to the SIS (MI-6) Philby's gaily bohemian survival in Beirut after betrayal was more than they could bear. If Philby could not be brought back to England, for unproductive questioning by . . . police, he could at least be

sent into exile. For the sake of the SIS morale, it was therefore finally decided to confront him with the evidence and break him down—break him down in a way which could never be done in England.

"This was acceptable also to Macmillan since Philby's return to Britain under any circumstances would result in a messy trial and demands for an inquiry into the running of the security services. Philby had already damaged SIS morale enough. Far better if he left the West for good.

Direct Action Sought

"The CIA, less worried about public opinion, wanted more direct action and at one point were considering a swift

attempt to snatch Philby. When he disappeared on his way to keep a dinner engagement at the house of Hugh Balfour Paul, first secretary at the British Embassy, they became so Third Man conscious themselves that they grilled Balfour Paul at length to try to find out if he had given the warning."

Philby had been recalled from Washington in 1951 after the Burgess-Maclean defection. The fact that they both were friends of Philby, and that they left together, turned the glare of suspicion on Philby.

But Philby took a great gamble, coming home to defend himself successfully against his accusers. Although Philby was then believed to have gone off the payroll, he was in fact still on it and remained a British agent right up to his defection, the Sunday Times reported.

Exonerated by MacMillan

Philby was exonerated of all blame by Harold Macmillan in Parliament in October, 1955, an action whose origins are still uncertain but which is suspected to have been initiated by friends of Philby within the intelligence community.

It was after the arrest and interrogation of George Blake in 1961 that Philby "knew that he was no longer safe," the Sunday Times said. From then it was only a matter of time until he had to face charges of treason or defect.

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